

The question may not be, Is America better off? We know that America is probably safer than what we were on September 11 or on September 12, 2001. We know that America is much safer than what we were before September 11. We also recognize that we may be safer, but we are still not safe. But there are other questions that can be asked: Are the Afghan people better off today than they were 4 years ago? Are the people of Iraq better off than they were 4 years ago? Are the people in Libya facing a brighter future because of the decisions that have been made over the last few months than they were 4 years ago?

Tonight I do not claim that we have solved all of these problems or all of these issues. I think that we recognize that there is still a tremendous amount of work to do in each of these areas. But Afghanistan does have a new government. Afghanistan does have a new constitution. The Taliban is gone from power. They still exist in various forms of resistance. Al Qaeda no longer has a safe haven in Afghanistan to plan additional attacks against the United States and the rest of the free world. They are still planning those attacks, but the first thing that they have to plan each and every day is how they are going to get through that day. They no longer have the luxury of believing, and during the 1990s knowing, that America would not strike them, even though we knew where they were and we maybe had some idea of their overall intentions and that they had declared war on the United States that we would leave them alone.

So Afghanistan is freer and better off than they were. Saddam Hussein is no longer in power. As ugly as the abuses have been in the prisons by American troops, by a limited number of American troops, we cannot lose the perspective that probably over 300,000 Iraqis were driven to their graves through the brutality of the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Libya is now in the process of disarming. A couple of months ago, I had the opportunity to meet with Muammar Qaddafi in Libya. We tried to understand exactly why Qaddafi had made this switch in strategy, why from being on a list of terrorist states he had evolved to a position where now he was disclaiming any terrorist intent, working with the United States and working with the European Union to disarm, but not only to disarm from weapons of mass destruction but to disclose to the United States and others the capabilities that he had in his nuclear weapons program, which is a step forward, to also not only describe what his program was and to give us many of the materials but also to give us an understanding as to how he had acquired those materials and what was the network of suppliers that facilitated the development of his nuclear weapons program.

As we better understand that network, we also get a clearer picture of

what maybe exists today in Iran, what may exist in North Korea as they were on the market shopping for nuclear weapons programs.

So are these three countries and the people in these countries better off? The 50 million people alone in Afghanistan and Iraq that have been liberated from terrorist regimes, are they better off than what they were 4 years ago? Are the people of Libya better off in the new course that their leader has embarked on? I think the answer is very, very clear. The answer is absolutely yes. Is America safer because of a change in regimes in Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq? I think the answer is clear. It is an absolute yes.

Again I am not saying that the work is done. As we see in the media, as we get in our briefings each and every day, there is still a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done. But we cannot forget the unity that this Nation had after September 11, a unity that said we need to stare terrorism in its face and we need to stare it down and we need to take the battle to the terrorists. That was the message that came from the White House. But that was also the message that was embraced by this Congress and supported by this Congress.

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What we need to recognize is that going to war and rebuilding or building representative government or new governments in each of these countries is not an easy process. We maybe had a quick major conflict, a McDonald's war, but when we get done with it, we recognize that building a new Iraq and a new Afghanistan is going to take a tremendous amount of time. And that is the process that we are embarking on today.

But take a look at what has happened. It is progress. Afghanistan is free. Libya has disarmed. Saddam Hussein is no longer in power. Iraq is becoming a free country, making the heart of the Middle East more stable and, therefore, making America more secure. We are more secure because we now have a Department of Homeland Security. Is all the work in the Department of Homeland Security complete? Absolutely not. We do not create that type of an agency and give them that type of a mission and believe in 12 to 18 months that all of that work is going to be completed.

But we now have a Department of Homeland Security that is focused on making sure that our airports are more secure, making sure that our ports are more secure, making sure that our local communities are more secure, because we are developing an infrastructure, a database that allows information-sharing across all levels of government so that we will be more prepared to identify the threats that we face and hopefully to respond to those threats in such a way that a threat never becomes a successful attack on America.

All of our border activities have been consolidated into the Department of

Homeland Security, a single agency, doing away with a multitude of different organizations that allowed in some cases the opportunities for some of the 9/11 hijackers to slip through our borders, to rent apartments, to find employment and to train in flight schools, only to have their visas approved by INS after they carried out the attacks on the Twin Towers.

So we are facing the issues that have been identified and moving forward, moving forward in a very difficult process because America is still a free country. And that is exactly what we want to maintain. We want to maintain a free society, but we want to maintain a society that is free and safe. Those are the two paths that we are continuing to try to balance.

I do not know if the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) has any comments. There are lots of things we want to talk about, but I think this is kind of set in context to answer that first question: Are we better off? Absolutely. We recognize the threat that this Nation faces. We are addressing that threat, and we are working and focusing on that real threat each and every day. We do not claim absolute security and safety, but we do now recognize the threat and continue to work to try to make sure that we will not have another terrorist attack in the United States.

I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY).

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I certainly thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. HOEKSTRA) for organizing this Special Order tonight.

Mr. Speaker, we are here to pay tribute really to the courage, the commitment, and the endurance of our service men and women. And specifically I would like to spend a few moments kind of reflecting on the tremendous job that our troops have been doing in Iraq.

We must never forget that our American forces are primarily responsible for one of the most complex and awesome military successes in history. And the overwhelming majority of our troops did it with compassion, with care for the dignity and the basic human rights of the Iraqi people.

Remember that our military, our military, liberated 25 million Iraqi citizens in just over 3 short weeks. And when we include Afghanistan, American troops have now liberated over 50 million people from oppressive regimes.

Yet despite this military success story, Mr. Speaker, I cannot think of another time in which so much precious time and treasure have been invested in the reconstruction of another country. An international coalition led by America is now building new, modern power plants, a totally new phone system, and nearly 2,500 schools.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Michigan I know has been to Iraq several times, has been to Afghanistan, been to Libya. He has seen what I saw